

# POINT WELLS OIL SPILL

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## HEALTH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This fact sheet answers some frequently asked health questions about the Point Wells Oil Spill. For more information, please refer to the resources listed on the back.

### **Background**

An oil spill at the Chevron Texaco terminal at Point Wells in southern Snohomish County released about 4,800 gallons of oil into the Puget Sound. On December 30, 2004, some of this oil reached the northern shore of Port Madison, including the Port Madison Indian Reservation, between the Indianola Dock and Point Jefferson. Rough seas and strong winds pushed the oil into the marsh directly behind the beach at Doe-kag-wats.

Clean up of this oil spill began immediately. In accordance with a pre-existing plan for responding to oil spills on Washington's marine waters, a "Unified Command" was established to ensure a coordinated effort to clean up the oil. This group includes officials from the US Coast Guard, the Suquamish Tribe, Washington State Department of Ecology, Kitsap County and Foss Maritime.

### **Is it O.K. to walk on the beach?**

The area east of the entrance to Miller Bay to Point Jefferson is open for people to walk on and enjoy. Swimming and wading are OK, but if you see oil or an oily rainbow-colored sheen, get out of the water promptly. The Suquamish Tribe has closed their beach and the marsh area behind it until further notice. Remember to respect private property and Tribal property in the area. Please avoid any workers who may be cleaning up remaining oil.

### **What should I do if oil gets on my child or me?**

Avoid prolonged skin contact with oil. If oil gets on your skin, wash it off with soap and water. Sometimes rubbing a gentle "baby oil" product onto the skin and washing it off again will help. Do not use solvents, gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuel, or similar products to clean your skin.

### **Can I eat clams from this area?**

No. At this time they are considered contaminated. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) closed recreational and commercial clam harvest in the area that is east of the entrance to Miller Bay to Point Jefferson on December 31, 2003. The Kitsap County Health District has posted closure signs at public access areas between the Indianola dock and Camp Indianola. Once the beach is cleaned of oil and clam samplings show the clams are safe to eat, you will be able to harvest and eat clams from this area again. On an oil free beach, the clams should cleanse themselves within weeks or months.

### **Can I eat fish caught from this area?**

Yes. Finfish are more mobile than clams, and are able to avoid the oil that might have been present.

### **Can I eat crabs from this area?**

Two common sense guidelines have been useful after other oil spills. First, look over the crab and make sure there's no visible oil on its surface. Second, smell the crab to assure that there is no detectable oil smell. Since crabs are more mobile than clams, they can avoid oil spills like this one and do not require the extensive testing that clams must undergo to assure safety.

## What clam sampling is being done?

Clam samples were collected shortly after the spill and some of them showed levels of oil that may be a public health concern. The clams will be tested again after the beach clean up is completed to see if they are safe to eat. More tests will be conducted later, if needed.

## How did you know what to test the clams for?

The oil that was spilled (the source oil) has been tested to determine what toxins it contained. The main chemicals of concern to human health are Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs). These are a group of over 100 chemicals that can be found in crude oil, coal tar and creosote. People are exposed to PAHs daily, through tobacco smoke, wood smoke and contaminated air. Another source of PAH exposure is through eating cooked foods, like charbroiled meat.

## What are the health risks of PAHs?

For most people an occasional brief contact with a small amount of oil, while not recommended, will do no harm. However, some people are especially sensitive to chemicals, including PAHs. They may have an allergic reaction or develop skin rashes even from brief contact with oil. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has determined that extended exposure to some PAHs may cause cancer. Some people who have breathed or touched mixtures of PAHs and other chemicals for long periods of time have developed cancer.

Anyone finding oil on the beach after the clean-up crews have left the area should call the Washington State Department of Emergency Management at: 1-800-258-5990.

## Resources



Kitsap County Health District  
Environmental Health Division  
Shawn Ultican: (360) 337-5622



Washington State Department of Health  
Office of Communications  
Donn Moyer: (360) 236-4076

Indian Health Service  
Environmental Health Services  
Karin Knopp: (360) 792-1235



Suquamish Tribe Human Services Department  
Community Health Nurse  
Barbara Hoffman: (360) 598-3311

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